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Educating Diversity, Understanding Ambiguity: Trailing Indonesian University Students' Attitudes through Instant Poems

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Diversity actually is undeniable reality and Indonesia has the ideological concept of diversity imprinted in its national slogan as *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). However, the real implementation of the slogan is still beyond expectation. The goals of this research are to trail university students' attitude toward diversity based on their conceptual understanding of the national slogan, their daily exposure toward diversity, and to critically analyze their ambiguous attitudes toward diversity. The research was conducted in 10 universities all over Indonesia with 267 respondents from English Department students. The respondents were asked to write an instant poem on free diversity experience and answer a questionnaire distributed afterward. The result of the study has shown that despite the fact that most of the students have positive attitude toward diversity in their poem, with almost perfect conceptual understanding of the national slogan, most of them still have ambiguous attitude in a deeper level of their claim upon individual declaration as a (non)pluralist. It is suggested that restoration and transformation of perception on diversity through education, new acceptance of hybridity and redefined identity, by reimagining diversity as empowering, is essentially needed to change Indonesian diversity reality into unity and prosperity.

Keywords: Diversity, ambiguity, attitude, poem, university student

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has actually been blessed by its clear definition of ideological concept of diversity since the beginning. The national slogan *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) has been adopted as an ideology since Indonesia's Independence 17 August 1945 as written in the Nation Symbol *Garuda Pancasila*. The inclusion of the slogan in the national ideological symbol *Garuda Pancasila* (even grabbed physically by the eagle *Garuda*) signifies fundamental awareness of the nation founders that diversity among the people is something to be "grabbed" or embraced and without which the nation's dream is impossible to realize.

In the process of living as a nation, there have been tragic moments where failures in embracing diversity have

caused nationwide trauma, such as the 1965 communist coup and its banishment afterward known in history as "a massacre against real and imagined communists occurred, the Chinese population groups being one of the targets" (Dieleman, Koning, and Post, 2011: 10), or 1998 chaos, particularly directed to Chinese ethnic group and "Many refer to May 1998 as a watershed in the history of Chinese Indonesians" (Koning, 2007: 136), and its ignorance of the human right violation with hardly any law enforcement against the violation afterward. Some regional tragedies also happened for years such as the seemingly religious conflicts in Poso (Ambon) between Christians and Moslems, or Sampit ethnic conflicts between Dayaknese and Madurese, or conflicts and violence against Ahmadiyah community with the absence of government's responsibility to protect the minority (Mariani, 2013) causing thousands of victims. A study of

three prominent public high schools in Yogyakarta by Muhammad Iqbal Ahnaf entitled *Contesting Morality: Youth Piety and Pluralism in Indonesia* has revealed that there is a promoted Islamizing youth within high school through Rohis (Islamic Spirituality) after the introduction of a law on the educational system in 2003 which requires schools to provide religious education based on the religion of the students. The study has also revealed that there is a contesting moral enforcement between the religious and exclusive revivalist group and the liberal and secular moderate group. "Two reasons can be noted for the continuation of revivalist faith inculcation at schools...moral panic and pluralist neglect" (Ahnaf, 2012: 19). The space given by the school authority to this revivalist group and the educational law have given no room for diversity or pluralism to develop among the public high school students who are supposed to experience more exposure to diversity in their education process.

The very diversity has just been reemphasized last year (2015) in the Ninth of Nine Priorities known as *NawaCita* (Nine Ideals) of today's JokoWidodo's government stated as "To strengthen diversity and Indonesian social restoration through the policy of diversity education empowerment". A renewed awareness is reflected in the ideal: Indonesia needs social restoration of diversity realities and education is the best way to reach this ideal. Policies on diversity education should be issued as not to repeat the same old and failed pattern where diversity realities stop as mere knowledge without real practice—a topic to be discussed later in this paper.

This research is based on the instant poems written by English Department students from 10 universities all over Indonesia, combined with the questionnaires distributed to them after the poem writing is done. This paper will mainly discuss the students' attitude toward diversity, their conceptual understanding of Indonesian diversity, their real exposure and experience, and critical analysis on their ambiguity of attitude based on the (in)consistencies of their stated attitudes, their claim or label themselves as being pluralist, and their understanding of diversity realities both conceptually and practically. The discussion ends with conclusion and implication for Indonesian policy in the future.

Diversity itself is actually absolute, and is defined as "the quality of being different...derived from 'diverse' meaning differing from one another; or simply composed of distinct elements or qualities" (Parvis, 2013: 13). There are many kinds of diversity common to all people, such as "culture, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, age, ability, language, weight, style, idea, income, orientation, geographic location, and many more aspects which make people unique" (p. 15). The attitude toward diversity is not always straight or apparent, that's why indirect expressions such as poetry—moreover written instantly for provoking genuineness—can help in tracing their true attitude. Attitude in this context is defined as "the emotional spin a poet puts on his words; the edge or attitude in the voice of a

poem...the coloration of the words, their shading, their warmth or coolness—as in painting. It is also how they sound, their pitch (high or low), harmony (sweet or shrill), and volume (loud or soft)—as in music" (Drury, 2006: 322). Further, it is defined as the attitude the poet takes toward a theme or a subject (Kennedy & Gioia, 2005:717).

Trailing the attitude toward diversity is not always simple, particularly of those young people because negative reaction toward diversity rooting for example from racism with its new faces nowadays is often indirect and subtle. In the light of this complexity, a literary expression such as poetry with its nature of implicitness can help in illuminating what is essentially "talking" in the indirect and metaphorical expressions. William Wordsworth has emphasized the idea of spontaneity and tranquility in poetry creation—two seemingly contradictory sides—while both constitute psychological and emotional experience when a person lives a reality. Spontaneity designates "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", an instantaneous flowing of emotions for or against the reality, while tranquility involves time and contemplation of the reality. The poetic creation process have room for both sides because the created expressions are actually recollected from highlights of the past positive or negative experiences—all inhabiting the mind—prompted by the momentum happening right before the creation. The mechanism is explained as follows: "These feelings do not at once lead to the creation of poetry; they are recalled by the poet after the actual situation. Poetry...takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind" (Brett & Jones, 2005: xlv). The question of originality and purity of emotions and feelings is also highlighted by Wordsworth when he talked about modified emotional responses reflected in the created expressions. Modification signifies impurity and unoriginality, thus a poem is naturally resulted from modified emotions appropriating the poet's background, intention, and ideology, and as a result appropriation is a fundamental mechanism in the creation: "...our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts and our thoughts are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings" (Brett & Jones, 2005: xlv). This research has purposely combined the idea of spontaneity and tranquility in a poem creation at a point when a poem—though written instantly for more genuine attitudes—is a means of expression of crystallized ideas and attitudes that have for some time inhibited the author's mind. The participants are then instantly asked to freely write down their thoughts or ideas on diversity reality into a free poem and submit the result afterward. All participants are English Department students who have studied or at least been introduced to poetry (through subjects such as Poetry Analysis and Introduction to English Literature) so that they are familiar with the way of expressing themselves in a literary way and comprehend literary expressions. They are given around 30-45 minutes to write the poem related to their real life experience on diversity, especially on how they take side and take a positive, negative, or neutral/ambiguous attitude over

this diversity problem. The emotions or feelings resulted from a poem can be so strong to the creator and reader that we believe this medium can provide insightful and original expression of attitudes from the heart's affection toward diversity. Coleridge, Keats, and Wordsworth have emphasized this point, "*The feeling aroused by these poems was to be so powerful and of such a kind that it would, as Coleridge describes it, be analogous to the supernatural, to have an almost religious quality; to be, to use a phrase of Keats (who owed so much to Wordsworth), a feeling of the 'holiness of the heart's affections*" (Brett & Jones, 2005: xxix). Thus, there is a belief that poetry may be a strong medium of expression of powerful feelings and emotions.

2. CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF INDONESIAN DIVERSITY

There are 267 participants in this research. The result concerning the attitudes is described in following data recapitulation based on their poems.

Positively, most students (56.17%) have positive attitudes toward diversity. However, a substantial number of them have negative (22.84%) and neutral (20.97%) attitudes, making a total of 43.81%. The result signifies that they still don't totally see diversity as something positive, constructive

University/ Attitude	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
Un. Sriwijaya Palembang	23	6	1	30
STIBA SaraswatiBali	17	4	6	27
Un. Udayana Bali	8	5	5	18
Un. Cenderawasih Papua	12	2	6	20
Un. Andalas Padang	17	2	2	21
Un. Sanata Dharma Yogya	12	14	6	32
Un. Petra Surabaya	8	8	5	21
Un. Maranatha Bandung	12	3	5	20
Un.Indonesia Depok	17	10	11	38
Un.Negeri Malang	24	7	9	40
Total	150	61	56	267
Percentage	56.17	22.84	20.97	100

or empowering. Three universities all from Java have the biggest portion of negative attitude (USD, UKP, UI) while the others, especially those from outside Java (Bali, Palembang, Papua, and Padang) have mostly positive attitudes. This is surprisingly paradoxical for those coming from big cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya and Yogyakarta—where diversity of ethnicity and religion is much more varied or heterogeneous—turn out to have more negative attitude. The more modern the university setting is the more negative the students' attitude toward diversity reality.

To understand the respondents' conceptual understanding of diversity and their attitude toward the concept, three questions were asked. First, they were asked of how familiar they are with the national slogan *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, second, whether they (dis)agreed with the statement "*Different is dangerous*", and thirdly, to what degree they agreed that "*Beauty is in the eye of the beholder*". Conceptually, almost all students know the

meaning of the national slogan (93.62%) with 76.02% know the slogan very well. Only one (0.74%) did not know at all of the slogan (probably a foreign student). Then, asked about a more universal concept of diversity acceptance or denial by the statement "*Different is dangerous*", most disagreed (64.79%) with 34.44% strongly disagreed and 30.33% disagreed. 13.10% had no opinion and 22.21% agreed (11.23% strongly agreed and 10.98% agreed). The result has shown although most students disagreed with the opinion that diversity can be dangerous, there is still a significant number of them (22.21%) who dangerously think the other way round. Cross-checked the other way round, by asking their personal perception of a more universal statement "*Beauty is in the eye of the beholder*"—indirectly indicating that diversity is unconditional and the perception on it is in itself diverse—most the respondents (86.51%) agreed, with 55.43% strongly agreed and 31.08% agreed), much higher than the previous opinion on the danger of being different. Those who disagreed were very small in number (only 4.11%). This signifies a positive attitude that fundamentally almost all respondents accept the diversity, at least of personal perception diversity.

3. EXPOSURE AND REAL EXPERIENCE

To trail the students' exposure to diversity, a few questions were asked. When asked "*In friendship, do you experience pluralist ('colorful') environments and friends?*", most student answered "so-so (pluralist enough, 34.08%)", 31.08% said "Yes, much" and 16.10% answered "Yes, very much" making a total of 81.26% having pluralist (colorful) environments. This means that most of them have been exposed to diversity in their daily life. Only some of them have little (14.23%) and very little (2.99%) exposure. This is strengthened by their answer when asked whether they had exclusive socialization with groups of similar background (e.g. the same gender, ethnic group, religion, race, origin, and hobby). Most of them from all 10 universities (69.28%) said "No". So, in their daily social life, most of them have socialized with diverse people and backgrounds. This result does not go along with their attitudes discussed previously. Those who have the biggest portion of negative attitudes in their poems (USD, UKP, UI) actually have been socially exposed to diversity in their daily life, meaning that they do not exclusively make friends with homogenous groups. 84.37% of USD students, 61.91% of UKP students, and 73.68% of UI students do not socialize exclusively. This signifies that social exposure to diversity does not guarantee that they will have positive attitude toward diversity.

Further, asked whether they have unfavorable experiences dealing with diversity in their daily life, 39.70% said that they sometimes had the experience, 35.20% had it but very rare and 18.35% never experienced it. Only 5.24% had it quite often and 1.49% had it most of the time.

Overall, the daily negative experience concerning diversity reality can be considered as minor.

4. AMBIGUITY OF ATTITUDE

To ultimately trail the students' attitude toward diversity, they were asked to measure their own degree: "*If you are asked to measure your concern on pluralism as you understand it, will you say that you have...degree of being a pluralist person*". The result has shown that 8.98% had a very high degree and 34.08% high, making 47.06%, less than a half of the total participants. On the other hand, there were only 5.61% of the students who had a low degree and 1.12% very low. Surprisingly, most of them (48.68%) had a medium degree of being pluralist. This result is paradoxically against their conceptual knowledge about diversity, their attitude toward universal diversity concepts such as beauty as subjective or difference as dangerous. The choice to be "medium" indicates that their attitude is ambiguous. They don't have enough confidence to obviously claim to be a pluralist or non-pluralist. They tend to safely choose the medium scale of both sides. This ambiguous attitude may be questioned in two ways that may lead to an important conclusion. First, if they claim to (almost, 93.62%) totally understand the conceptual meaning of the ideological slogan *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), then they agree (64.79%) that being different is not dangerous, and they also philosophically agree (86.51%) that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, moreover, most of their poems are also positive in tone, then why don't most of them ideologically accept and apply the national slogan for real with strong attitude of a real pluralist individual? Why do so many of them just label themselves as "so so"? Second, what probably stops them from being a pluralist while their own daily experiences and socialization have exposed most of them (81.26%) to diversity, where most of them (69.28%) do not socialize exclusively, and they also rarely have unfavorable experience?

From the above questions, one conclusion may be drawn safely: the thorough understanding and knowledge of conceptual meaning of the national slogan has not yet been supported by a real implementation in real life through a strong and confident claim as a pluralist individual as ideologically and ideally commanded by the national slogan *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. The young intellectuals themselves are ambiguous in their attitudes toward Indonesian diversity and its acceptance as rules of life as a good citizen.

The ambiguity of the attitudes can also be trailed through the metaphors used in the students' poems because metaphors as emphasized by Fainsilber and Ortony (1987: 240-241) have three communicative functions: to cope with inexpressibility, compactness, and vividness of expressions hard to convey by other media. In our previous study of microaggression and diversity (see Akun & Wiwik, 2015), we have discussed that some

metaphors found in the students' poems such as *pluracism*, pity rainbow, you and me but not we, a bowl of intermingled salad, imagined untrue "color" of "unity", the long journey, "Red and White" into blue and black, "giant" and "Small soldier", nonsense One, and question: Are we better? The metaphors have spoken of microaggressive attitudes among people in the society where the existence of a new and modern face of racism is unconsciously practiced. The ambiguity of attitudes is obvious in the reality that subtle denial of diversity of ethnic groups, religions, social strata, etc. is unconsciously practiced and accepted. There is no clear-cut attitude of embracing (or rejecting) the diversity reality as an obligation of good citizen from most of the studied participants.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION: WHAT TO DO NEXT?

The above discussion has shown that both students' tone in their poetry and their own label as a pluralist individual fall into ambiguity of attitude toward diversity reality in the country. Most of the young intellectuals are not brave enough to claim that they are purely and openly pluralist as commanded by the national slogan and ideology. They have the tendency to label themselves safely as "so-so pluralist" indicating that they may go both sides, presumably depending on the influence they may have in the course of their life as a citizen. The intensive socialization and exposure to diversity in their life, with almost perfect conceptual understanding of the national slogan "unity in diversity", still do not make them confidently claim to be a real pluralist citizen. The conceptual understanding of the slogan and its meaning stops as merely knowledge, and this conclusively means at the same time that mostly the slogan stays merely a slogan as well. Implementation of the slogan into real practices in daily life through strong attitudes of diversity acceptance is found still below average.

From this study, it is obvious that the next duty from today's government is to convince and transform the "so-so pluralist" young generation into real pluralist citizens. The *NawaCita* with its last point "To strengthen diversity and Indonesian social restoration through the policy of diversity education empowerment" has just been on the right track. Why? There are three reasons. First, there is awareness that Indonesian diversity is a positive potential to be strengthened, thus all citizens are obliged to strengthen it by accepting the diversity reality. Second, there is awareness that Indonesia needs social restoration of this diversity reality. This implies restoration of attitudes, from negative and neutral into positive, from rejecting and equivocating into embracing. Restoration itself means in this context to re-store the right ideal imprinted in the national slogan into its right place after supposedly being directed away and wrongly by non-pluralist citizens, including educators. Third, education is the most effective way to execute this awareness, and diversity education empowerment is just the right thing to have. The changing, or to a certain degree the transforming, of ideology and mindset is the epitome of all the efforts.

To borrow the Pakistani Nobel Prize winner Malala Yousafzai's wise words: *One child, one teacher, one pen, and one book can change the world* and to analogize her strong statement: *"With guns you can kill terrorists, with education you can kill terrorism"*, we propose a slogan: *"With education, we can change Indonesian diversity reality into unity and prosperity"*. This slogan emphasizes that only through education we can change the attitude of Indonesian citizen from denying or equivocating into embracing diversity.

A fundamental mindset has to be transformed and hybridity is the most reasonable suggested solution for this problem. We have to change the belief for example that certain ethnicities or cultures are more superior or better than others because they are all identities, and identity as emphasized by Heryanto (2014) is fictitious because it is based on something "fundamentally, though not entirely, a fiction" (p. 134) just like stories in films. The same concept of fictitiousness applies to Indonesian "Communism" since 1966, Indonesian "Chineseness", or "Islam" after 9/11 in various parts of the world. This postmodern concept of identity or ethnicity as fiction advocates the idea that purity or originality is merely imaginary and impossible to be defined in "any purely objectivist and materialist fashion" because the imagined reality is always fluid and fragmentary,

and thus unmanageably possible to be delineated and defined in an objective, factual, wholly, and non-fictitious way. This is contrary to the common belief—perhaps still growing prosperously in Indonesian context—that "the fiction precedes and invents the real" (p. 134), that the real is fabricated and created based on the fiction developing in people's imagination of purity or originality. By borrowing the concept that identity—so is purity or originality—is fiction, and only then we can embrace diversity by fostering intercultural, interracial, inter-belief, inter-social class, inter-ability, etc. interaction, respect and acceptance. When asked to suggest the way to cope with diversity problems, the respondents of this research mostly suggest similar key words: appreciate, tolerate, respect, and accept others. They actually know and agree of what to do. The only issue is how to put these into practice. Education is supposed to broaden perspective and liberate young generation to see the diversity of realities, not paradoxically narrow their view of the diversity realities.

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